

ROMAN POLICY IN ARMENIA AND TRANSCAUCASIA, AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE.

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The relations between Rome and the kingdom of Armenia had their origin in the defeat administered by the Scipio brothers to Antiochus the Great in the battle of Magnesia. In the ensuing break-up of the western portion of the Seleucid Empire the satraps of the districts comprising the high table-land of Armenia and the valley of the river Aras made submission to the Romans and received from them the title of King.¹

Artaxias, thus constituted king of the eastern section, enlarged his kingdom by the annexation of the surrounding districts, until it embraced most of the Armenian table-land. His capital was Artaxata, near the modern Erivan, where the Aras Valley broadens out into the plain which modern Armenians hold to be the cradle of the human race.

It was, however, Artaxias's descendant, Tigranes the Great, who caused Rome to tighten her hold on Armenia. As a result of his imperialistic ambitions and his alliance with his father-in-law, Mithradates of Pontus, he came into conflict with the Romans. After a crushing defeat at the hands of Pompey he was forced to admit a Roman garrison into Artaxata and to make submission to the Roman general, placing his crown in Pompey's hands, to receive it again from him as the gift of Rome. From this time on Armenia was, by turns, a vassal kingdom under a scion of the house of Artaxias or a Romanized princeling from some petty kingdom of western Asia, a Roman client state under a younger son or brother of the King of Parthia, a province of the Empire, and again a Roman protectorate ruled by a Parthian.

A relationship, moreover, not very dissimilar, was developed between Rome and the kingdoms northeast of Armenia—Iberia, corresponding to the region about the modern Tiflis, and Albania, including the basin of the lower Kur as far as the Caspian Sea. These districts also were overrun by Pompey. He defeated their kings, forced them to give hostages and sue for peace,² and displayed their

¹ Strab. XI., pp. 528, 531f.

² Plutarch, Pomp., 24-28; Dio XXXVII, 2-5.

names in his triumphal procession in the list of the monarchs whom he had conquered.² For a time, at any rate, he held the strongholds of Armastica and Seusamora near Tiflis, which command not only the valley of the Kur but also the Pass of Dariel.⁴

The policy of Pompey was continued by Antony. Artavasdes, the son and successor of Tigranes, was ordered to furnish troops for Antony's Parthian campaign in 36, and P. Canidius Crassus occupied once more the strongholds south of the Caucasus and forced the kings of Iberia and Albania to become so-called allies of Rome.⁵

With the accession of Artavasdes's son, Artaxes, begins the long series of Roman and Parthian intrigues that play so great a part in the story of Roman policy in Armenia. Renouncing all allegiance to Rome, Artaxes formed an alliance with the Parthian monarch, Phraates, and ruled Armenia under Parthian suzerainty. Roman intrigue, however, was not inactive. Phraates was persuaded to abandon Rome's rebellious vassal, and the pro-Roman faction in Armenia was impelled to murder Artaxes and send a deputation to Augustus, requesting that Artaxes's brother, Tigranes, then a captive in Rome, be sent to rule in the kingdom of his ancestors.⁶

Tigranes, accordingly, was crowned king at Artaxata in 20 B. C. The act of coronation was performed by Tiberius Claudius Nero, stepson of Augustus, and Roman troops were present at the ceremony.⁷

So Roman suzerainty over Armenia was established, and at Rome coins were struck bearing the legend *Armenia Capta*.⁸

The reign of Augustus shows a series of determined, and sometimes almost desperate, attempts to retain this suzerainty. A succession of petty princes, first from the Armenian royal house, then, when this became extinct, from the neighboring principalities of Media Atropatene and Cappadocia were proclaimed kings of Armenia by the grace of Rome. Meanwhile the Parthian monarchs spared no effort to stir up trouble for the Roman vassal and to annex Armenia to the Parthian Empire. The ceremony of investiture performed by Tiberius in 20 B. C. was repeated by Gaius, the grandson of Augustus, in 1 A. D., acting as the special representative of the Roman Emperor. But toward the end of Augustus's reign the Roman claimant was driven from Armenia, and all the efforts to establish a Roman vassal king seemed to have been made in vain.

In Transcaucasia, on the other hand, the diplomacy of Augustus produced better results. The alliances that had been imposed by

² Appian, *Mithradates*, 107.

³ Strab. XI, p. 501; Dio XXXVII, 1.

⁴ Strab. XI, p. 501; Ptolemy, *Anton*, 34; Dio XLIX, 24.

⁵ Mon. Ancyrannum, V, 24; Tacitus, *Annals*, II, 8; Dio LIV, 3.

⁶ Mon. Ancyr., V, 24-25; Suetonius, *Tib.*, 9; Tacitus, *Ann.* II, 8; Dio LIV, 9.

⁷ Eckhel, *Doctrina Numorum*, VI, p. 26.

Canidius Crassus upon the princes of Iberia and Albania were perpetuated, and these monarchs were included by Augustus in the list of those who sought his friendship.⁹

The policy of holding Armenia in vassalage was continued with more success by Tiberius. Zeno, a prince of Pontus, was crowned by Germanicus at Artaxata as vassal king of Armenia,¹⁰ and after his death, about 35 A. D., the kingdom was conferred on Mithradates, brother of Rome's ally, the King of Iberia.¹¹ During the reign of Zeno the Parthians had made no move against Armenia, but at his death Artabanus III of Parthia seized the kingdom and proclaimed as king, first, his oldest son Arsaces; then, after his assassination by Mithradates, a younger son, Orodes.¹² Finally, however, he was forced to recognize Mithradates as king, Armenia again became a vassal state of Rome, and a Roman garrison was quartered near Artaxata.¹³

Rome's suzerainty, however, did not last for long. Mithradates was overthrown by his nephew,¹⁴ and the Parthian monarch, Vologases I claimed Armenia for his brother Tiridates. The result was a war with Rome. The government of Nero despatched Domitius Corbulo to Armenia. The table-land was invaded and Artaxata captured. Another Romanized princeling, one Tigranes, was established as king and the Roman garrison returned to Gorneae.¹⁵ The new claimant, however, did not remain in his kingdom for long. Vologases, roused by an unprovoked attack on the part of Tigranes, again proclaimed his brother Tiridates king of Armenia.¹⁶ Corbulo, evidently not deeming Tigranes worth the price of a Parthian war, entered into a series of negotiations looking to a diplomatic solution of the Armenian question. After many delays and in spite of a defeat administered by Vologases to Corbulo's colleague Paetus, governor of Cappadocia, it was finally arranged that Tiridates the Parthian should be king of Armenia, but as the vassal of Rome. As the result of this agreement Tiridates laid down his crown before the statue of Nero in the Roman camp and journeyed to Rome to receive it again from the Emperor himself.¹⁷

So the policy of Augustus was replaced by a new solution of the Armenia question—a compromise between Roman and Parthian. A Parthian prince ruled in Artaxata, but as Rome's vassal, and only

⁹ *Mon. Ancyr.*, V, 52.

¹⁰ *Tacitus, Ann.*, II, 56; *Strab.*, XII, p. 554.

¹¹ *Tacitus, Ann.*, VI, 32-33; *Dio LVIII*, 26.

¹² *Tacitus, Ann.*, VI, 33; *Dio LVIII*, 26; *Josephus, Ant. Jud.*, XVIII, 2, 4.

¹³ In the fortress of Gorneae; *Tacitus, Ann.*, XII, 45; cf. *Strab.*, XI, p. 529. It was doubtless on the Garai River, a tributary of the Aras.

¹⁴ *Tacitus, Ann.*, XIII, 44-46.

¹⁵ *Tacitus, Ann.*, XIII, 6-8, 39-41; *XIV*, 22-26; *Dio LXI*, 16.

¹⁶ *Tacitus, Ann.*, XV, 1-3; *Dio LXII*, 20.

¹⁷ *Tacitus, Ann.*, XV, 24-31; *Dio LXII*, 22-23.

after recognition by the Roman Emperor. This policy was maintained by the Flavian Emperors, who thus kept a peaceful hold on Armenia. Iberia, too, they held in control by a garrison at Armastica.¹⁸

Not until toward the end of Trajan's reign was there any change of policy. Then, in answer to an attempt on the part of the Parthian monarch to set up a king in Armenia in opposition to Rome, Trajan declared war, invaded the table-land, ordered the Parthian claimant to leave the country, and declared Armenia a Roman province.

This policy of outright annexation was reversed by Hadrian. Once more Armenia received a Parthian as king, but under the supremacy of Rome, and the compromise begun by Corbulo under Nero was continued through the second century.¹⁹ Even the war waged by Lucius Verus and his generals against the Parthians, in which Armenia was overrun by both Roman and Parthian and Artaxata destroyed, did not ultimately change the policy of Rome. A Roman garrison was maintained at the new capital, Valarshapat (now Etchmiadzin),²⁰ built by a Roman general to replace the destroyed Artaxata. Roman garrisons, too, were stationed at the eastern end of the Black Sea, and the kings of Iberia and Albania were kept in a position of dependence.

Amid the various changes in the policy pursued by Rome in Armenia, one principle stands out clearly: Armenia must be under Roman control and its king might rule only by the grace of Rome. In Transcaucasia a similar principle was followed. The King of Iberia was kept in close relationship, termed an alliance, but actually a position of dependence and even vassalage. A Roman garrison was maintained in the Plain of Erivan; and in Iberia Rome held the fortress of Armastica, commanding both the valley of the Kur and the Pass of Dariel.

The question is inevitable: Why this insistence on the control of these regions—the table-land of Armenia and the valleys of the Aras and the Kur? Why dispatch so many generals and so many armies to maintain this supremacy?

The reason is not to be found in the natural wealth of the country. Alexander, indeed, was told of gold mines in the Armenian mountains.²¹ But he was unsuccessful in his quest of the precious metal, and there is no evidence that any later search was made. The copper deposits in the mountains between the valley of the Aras and the basin of the lower Kur seem to have been altogether unknown in antiquity. And, though the plains of Armenia are rich and fertile,

¹⁸ According to an inscription found there of 75 A. D.; see *C. I. L.*, III, 6052, and *Cagnat, Inscr. Græc. ad Res Rom. part. III, 122.*

¹⁹ *C. I. L.*, III, 6052.

²⁰ *Strab.*, XI, p. 529.

no attempt was made to use them as a grain-producing area for the Roman world.

Nor was the aim of the Romans merely the maintenance of prestige in the East. It was not the method of Rome to squander resources of men and money merely for the maintenance of prestige, as the conservative policy on the Rhine and Danube frontiers sufficiently attests.

Nor, on the other hand, was the reason one of military necessity. Mommsen, it is true, finds an explanation in the statement that Armenia "was by its position, in a military point of view, a sally port for each of the great powers (Rome and Parthia) into the territory of the other,"²¹ and this theory has found wide acceptance. It does not, however, accord with practice. Of all the Roman attacks on the Parthians or the Persian Sassanids, two only were conducted by the route leading across the Armenian plateau and thence by the Aras into Persian Azerbaidjan—that of Antony in 36 B. C., and that of Severus Alexander in 232 A. D., and both of these were utter failures. All other invading Roman armies advanced against Ctesiphon by way of northern Mesopotamia. On the other hand, the Parthians never entered Roman territory by way of the Armenian plateau and the upper Euphrates, but always by the routes south of Malatia and the great gorge. Clearly, Armenia was little used as a "sally port."

It is perhaps not without significance that Trajan, after the acquisition of the new provinces of Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Babylonia, established customhouses on the Euphrates and the Tigris.²² It is perhaps not an unsafe assumption that a similar customhouse was maintained on the Aras at the bridge near Artaxata. However this may be, this bridge was a thoroughfare, the importance of which was indeed great. To the west of it extended the important highway leading across the table-land of Armenia to Erzerum and Ildja on the upper Euphrates, thence to Satala on the upper Kalkit Irmak, and so northward to Trebizond or westward to Asia Minor. This was the road that Corbulo used in order to send to his armies supplies from the Black Sea,²³ and this was the route by which Trajan invaded Armenia in 114.²⁴ Southeastward from Artaxata the great highway led down the valley of Aras, the route of the modern railway.²⁵ One branch followed the course of the river to the Caspian, another went to Ecbatana-Hamadan, whence led the caravan road through the Caspian Gates to India and China.²⁶

²¹ *Provinces of the Roman Empire*, II, p. 27.

²² *Fronto, Princ. Hist.*, p. 209 N, cited by Mommsen, *Provinces*, II, p. 75.

²³ *Tac. Ann.*, XIII, 39.1.

²⁴ *Dio-Cassius*, LXXVIII, 18-19.

²⁵ *Tab. Peutling*, Sec. X; *Miller, K. Itineraria Rom.*, p. 654f.

²⁶ *Tab. Peutling*, Sec. XI; *Miller, K. Itin. Rom.*, pp. 781f and 792f.

Between Ecbatana and the western world only two routes were possible, for the Hakkari and Zagros Mountains are an effective barrier between the Iranian plateau and the basin of the Tigris. Of these, one led over the Zagros Pass back of Khanikin and along the upper course of the Diala River.²² This was the route of Alexander. The other was the road along the Aras and through Armenia. The former must remain under Parthian control, for none but a Trajan or a Severus tried to hold the Tigris basin. The latter, on the other hand, would be controlled by the power that held Artaxata and the table-land to the west. The commercial and financial advantages of the control of the Plain of Erivan and of the Armenian plateau are evident.

This highway, however, the Romans could never hope to possess. So long as the Parthians held Ecbatana, they could divert traffic to the Khanikin route and away from the road which led to Artaxata. Iberia, on the other hand, afforded another means of communication with the East, a trade route undisturbed by Parthian or Persian. As early as the beginning of the third century B. C., Patrocles, acting under orders from Antiochus I, explored the Caspian Sea and reported the existence of an important trade route leading from northern India to the River Oxus, down the river by ship, and so into the Caspian Sea, either through a channel of the Oxus flowing into the Caspian, or from the river to the sea by some overland route.²³

Wares were then shipped across the Caspian and up the Kur to the head of navigation. From this point they were carried via Tiflis and Armastica to the Black Sea.²⁴ This route was investigated also by Pompey, the originator of the policy of Roman control of Armenia and Iberia. His exploring party maintained that in seven days a caravan could travel from India to a point on a navigable tributary of the Oxus. From here wares could be sent by ship to the Caspian and thence up the Kur to a point distant only five days' journey from the Black Sea.²⁵

The control of Iberia, therefore, assured the control of the western end of the trade route which led from the Black Sea through Transcaucasia to the mouth of the Kur, thence by way of the Caspian to the upper Oxus. From the valley of the upper Oxus, a road led via Merv across the Paropamisus Range to Herat,²⁶ corresponding

²² Tab. Peutling, Sec. I; Miller, *K. Itin. Rom.*, p. 791f.

²³ The ancient writers seem to have believed that the Oxus flowed into the Caspian, and until recently a depression between the lower course of the river and the Caspian Sea was regarded as the old bed of the Oxus. Now, however, it is more generally believed that the Caspian in antiquity extended much farther eastward than at present, and it is not impossible that the Oxus emptied into the eastern extension. For a summary of the question see P. Kropotkin, *Geogr. Journal*, XII (1898), p. 806-810.

²⁴ Strab. XI, p. 509; cf. Pliny, *N. H.*, VI, 53.

²⁵ Pliny, *N. H.*, VI, 53.

²⁶ Tab. Peutling, Sec. XI; Miller, *K. Itin. Rom.*, p. 794d.

presumably to the modern route. The short cut to India, however, led from the Oxus across the range of the Hindu Kush, probably by the Khawak Pass,²¹ to Alexandria in the Hindu Kush, situated, according to Pliny,²² 50 miles from Ortospa, the modern Kabul. Ortospa was the junction of the roads leading from Herat, from Bactra, and from India.²³ From Alexandria in the Hindu Kush and from Ortospa, well-defined routes led to the basin of the Indus.²⁴

The Plain of the Oxus was also the starting point of the trade route to China, over which passed the caravans that brought silk to the western world.²⁵ In the first century B. C. Bactra became a great silk market. The caravan routes from central China converged at Kashgar in the northeastern corner of Chinese Turkestan. From here the China trade crossed the mountains of Pamir past the Lithinos Pyrgos, mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus,²⁶ and thence via Faizabad to the Oxus.

Thus the Oxus valley was a great trade thoroughfare; its means of approach to the western world was by the way of the Caspian and Transcaucasia, and with the possession of the isthmus between the Caspian and the Black Seas the control of this route came into the hands of Rome. Accordingly, the policy of maintaining Roman supremacy in Armenia and Transcaucasia was dictated, not by military, but by economic and commercial considerations.

During the nineteenth century the control of the land routes to India was acquired by Russia. Beginning in 1801 with the annexation of the vassal kingdom of Georgia, she extended her Transcaucasian domain at the expense of Persia and Turkey, until, in 1829, she acquired Poti, on the Black Sea, and her frontier had been extended southward and eastward to the Aras and the mouth of the Kur.²⁷ The control of the great isthmus was completed by the acquisition of Batum in 1878. Finally, in 1907, the famous Anglo-Russian agreement secured to Russia the control of all northern Persia with the route from Teheran to the Afghan border. Railways followed in the wake of Russian expansion. The line from Tiflis to Alexandropol was continued past Erivan and down the valley of the Aras to Djulfa on the frontier of Persia, and about 1914 it was carried on to Tabriz, whence it was to proceed to Teheran.

²¹ This seems to have been the pass used by Alexander on his northward journey. See Arrian, *Anab. Alex.*, III, 28-29.

²² *Nat. Hist.*, VI, 61.

²³ Strabo XI, p. 514, and XVII, p. 733.

²⁴ See Ritter, *Erdrunde II*, p. 144.

²⁵ Hermann, A. *Die alten Seidenstrassen zwischen China und Syrien*, Berlin, 1910, p. 81.

²⁶ *XXIII*, 6, 80.

²⁷ Quadtieg, F. *Russische Expansionspolitik, 1774-1914*, Berlin, 1914, p. 113f.

Meanwhile, however, another route to India was planned by Russia. This was nothing less than the old caravan route by way of the Caspian and the Oxus plain to the Hindu Kush Range and thence to Kabul and India.

In 1869 Krasnovodsk, on the Caspian, was fortified. This was followed by the conquest in 1881 of the western part of the present Province of Transcaspia, and by the annexation of Merv in 1884. Thus Russian domination was extended to the Oxus. Here also the railway followed annexation. The Transcaspian line was begun in 1880; in 1886 it was extended to Merv, and in 1895 a branch line was constructed from Merv to Kushka, on the Afghan frontier.³⁸

British Russophobes have regarded the construction of this line as an important part of a Russian advance upon India.³⁹ They have pointed to the ease of invasion which its proximity affords, and have shown that with the aid of the Batum-Baku line, troops could be conveyed from Odessa to Merv in four or five days, and that the terminal station of Kushka is only about 75 miles distant from Herat. However this may be, the possession of Transcaspia assured to Russia the control of the northern routes into India. The road from Kushka leads to Herat and thence to Kabul to the east, or Kandahar to the southeast,⁴⁰ while another way is available from Tchardjui, where the railway crosses the Oxus, up the river by boat to Kilif, and thence by way of Balkh (ancient Bactra) across the Hindu Kush to Kabul,⁴¹ closely approximating the ancient trade route. From Kabul to Peshawar in the Punjab the distance is only 172 miles.

The recent Anglo-Persian treaty seemed to advance British control westward from Herat to the Aras and the border of Armenia and to ensure an approach to India through northern Persia. This approach can be connected with the western world by two routes—the one, the Zagros Pass, leading from Hamadan through Khanikin to the Tigris basin and the Bagdad Railway; the other, the way through Armenia, either to the Black Sea at Batum or Trebizond, or across the tableland into Anatolia and Constantinople.

The conquest of Mesopotamia seems to have assured to Great Britain the control of the Zagros approach, but the future status of Armenia is still undecided. The power that controls it will control, even as the Romans did, a highway of great economic and strategic importance and a position of advantage in the Near East.

³⁸ The distance by rail from Krasnovodsk to Kushka is 753 miles; Baedeker, *Russia*, 1914, p. 512.

³⁹ Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia*, London, 1889, p. 2672.

⁴⁰ Herat to Kabul, 500 miles; Herat to Kandahar, 339 miles; see Curzon, p. 418.

⁴¹ Kilif to Kabul via Balkh, 280 miles; Curzon, p. 418.